

Autistic children and the power of music

U.S. Fulbright Postgraduate Robert Accordino is following his dream of pursuing a career as a paediatrician specialising in children with autism. During his 12 months of postgraduate work at the University of Queensland's School of Psychology, Robert will continue to explore the possibilities for improvisational music therapy to increase the socialisation of autistic children.

“During my undergraduate years at Princeton University and the time since graduation, I have been fascinated by the way individuals with autism hear. More specifically, the way they use their auditory processing abilities to navigate the domains of music and language has become the focus of my research.



Robert Accordino with Charlie Lagden, age 7. (Photo printed with permission)

My project is focussing on younger, lower functioning autistic children and analysing the ways that specifically selected music can influence their behaviors, communications, and socialisations

- all areas that are drastically affected by this neurological disorder. My prior research has suggested that higher functioning teenagers with autism may show auditory deficiencies affecting language, but still perform well on musical tasks. Through my work at Autism Queensland, I hope to see if these younger children show reactions to music that indicate they exhibit musicality similar to those higher functioning individuals with autism.

During my time here, I have presented my research at the Biennial Australian Autism Conference in Canberra, the University of Queensland, and a workshop on autism spectrum disorders with the Australian Psychological Society. I am enormously grateful to the Fulbright Commission for allowing me to carry out this valuable research project, which could lead to improved education of, and therapy for these children.



Robert Accordino (left), Paula Latos-Valier and Mark Freeman

In addition to my research, I have enjoyed exploring this vast and glorious continent. I have also very much enjoyed spending time with the other Queensland based Fulbrighters: Mark Freeman, Beth Covitt, Jon Miller, and Vanessa Adams.

In Sydney, Mark and I were lucky enough to meet up with Paula Latos-Valier, Fulbright Commission Board Member and General Manager of the Biennale of Sydney. We got to share several cultural experiences, from an organ recital to Yum Cha, and even a tour of the Biennale. My life here has been greatly enriched by those connected to Fulbright. The individuals I have met through this tremendous Program have been some of the most inspiring I have ever encountered. Thank you again for this unique and wonderful experience.”

26 August, Melbourne. VIC Alumni Chapter Dinner. Victorian based Alumni and Commission Board members joined with current Australian and U.S. Fulbright Scholars. Returned Fulbrighter Dr Iain Butterworth and 2004 Scholar John Provis both spoke at the Dinner.



Kevin Jackman, QLD Alumni Chapter Secretary (centre) at a farewell BBQ for U.S Fulbrighter Jon Miller (second right). Also pictured (from left to right) are U.S Fulbrighters Robert Accordino, Beth Covitt and Mark Freeman

18 September, Washington DC. Inaugural U.S. Alumni Reunion Seminar and Dinner.

21 September, New York. Welcome function Australian Consulate, New York for U.S. Alumni and Australian Fulbrighters.

21 October, Canberra. Annual Australian Alumni Association (AFA) reception hosted by U.S. Ambassador Mr Thomas Schieffer, in recognition of the AFA's support for the Fulbright Program and current Award recipients.

25 November, Canberra. Thanksgiving. Financial ACT Alumni are invited to Thanksgiving Dinner at the Chifley on Northbourne Hotel on Thursday 25 November. Various State Alumni Chapters are also organising Thanksgiving dinner gatherings. Please contact your State Chapter representative (contact details page 8) for further information.

*2004 Events
and
Occasions...*